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For Immediate Release:
February 8, 2008

Tennesseans Urged to Exercise Caution When Giving for Tornado Relief

Todd Kelley, Director of the Division of Charitable Solicitations and Gaming, the agency which regulates charitable fundraising in Tennessee, warned Tennesseans to be wary of fundraising scams involving relief efforts for tornado victims, and urged donors to exercise caution when giving to any type of relief effort.

"I encourage individuals to give as much as they can to tornado recovery and relief efforts," said Kelley, "however, we have seen in other recent tragedies that, while they often bring out the best in many people, unfortunately, they also bring out the worst in a few individuals. Therefore, it is very important that donors exercise caution when making a contribution."

Kelley requested that people report suspicious activity to their local police and/or the Division of Charitable Solicitations and Gaming, and suggested donors take a few steps and precautions to ensure their gift will reach its intended target:

- ✓ **Ask Questions.** You should always ask why the charity or organization is seeking donations, how the money will be spent and if the charity is registered with the Division of Charitable Solicitations and Gaming. Find out if the person you're speaking with is a paid solicitor or a member or volunteer of the organization. If they are a paid solicitor, ask what percentage of the donation is kept by the fund-raiser. Sometimes the paid solicitor receives most of the money donated to the charity.
- ✓ **Check Facts On Charity.** There is nothing wrong with asking a charity for its name, address and telephone number, and then checking the information before you donate. A legitimate charity will not keep this information from you, and will not pressure you to give on the spot. Be wary of charities offering to send a courier or overnight delivery service to collect the donation immediately.
- ✓ **Check To See Where the Money is Going.** If you would like to know the breakdown of how a charity spends its money, there's now an easy way for you to access that information. Just go to the Tennessee Division of Charitable Solicitations and Gaming website, <http://www.state.tn.us/sos/charity>. There, you will find financial summaries for all the

charities registered in the state of Tennessee who have been in operation for a fiscal year. You can also call the division for information. Our number is (615)741-2555.

- ✓ **Avoid Giving Cash.** For security and tax purposes it is best to give your donation by check, because cash can be lost or stolen. Make your check out to the charity, not to the person collecting the money. Always ask for a receipt showing the amount of your contribution, and whether the donation is tax deductible.
- ✓ **Beware of Scam Artists.** Scam artists may take advantage of high profile events or tragedies by creating bogus fund-raising operations. Be suspicious of organizations with vague plans or no plan at all for distributing the donated funds. Sometimes, organizations will have names similar to well-known charities and organizations. Know who is asking you for money.
- ✓ **Give What You Can.** Once you find a charity you wish to support, contribute as often and generously as you can afford. Worthy charities are most successful with long-term, committed supporters.

If you would like more information contact the Tennessee Division of Charitable Solicitations and Gaming at 615-741-2555 or email us at charitable.solicitations@state.tn.us.

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